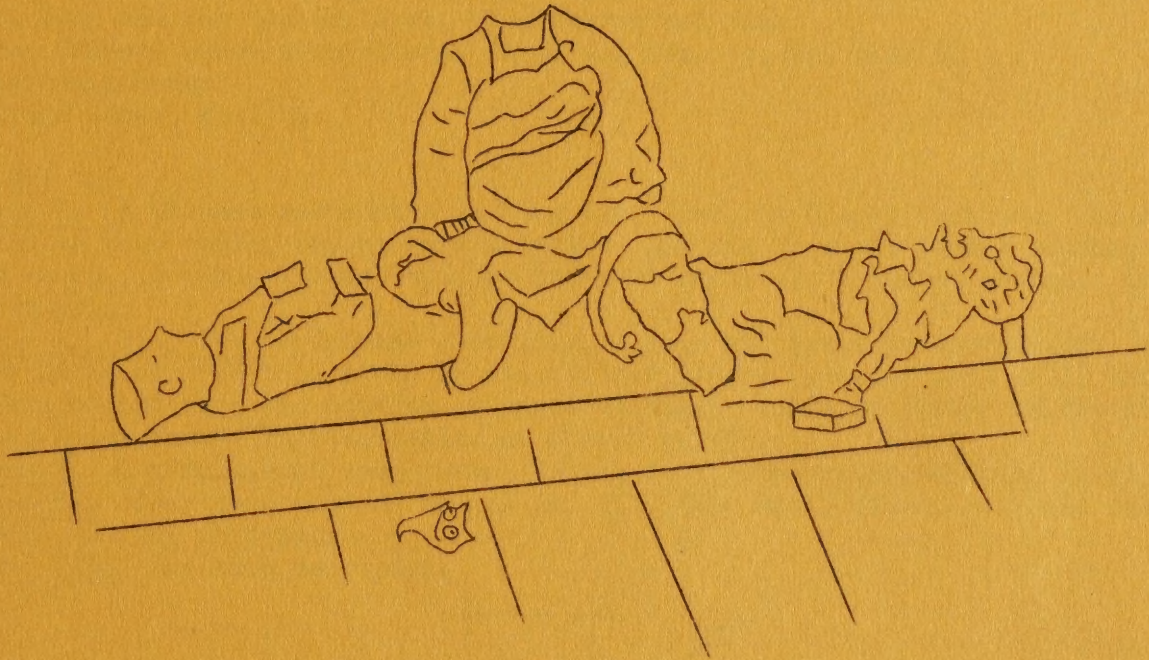


TOTTERING IDOLS

A PLAY FROM CHINA



Written By

Nettie M. Senger

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Price Ten Cents

GENERAL MISSION BOARD
Church of the Brethren
22 South State Street
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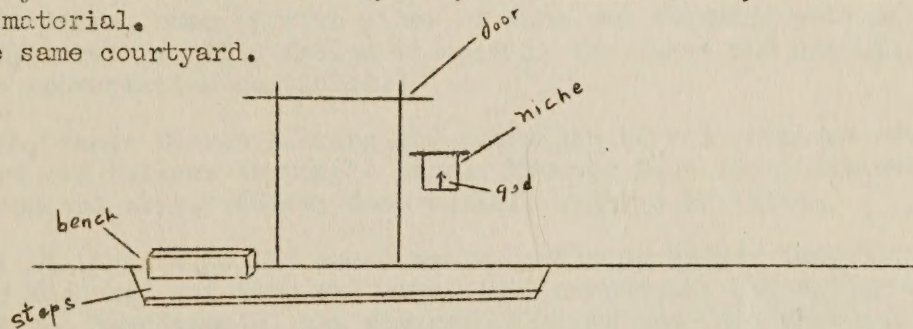
A Play of China in Seven Scenes

CHARACTERS:

Wang, restaurant waiter
 Chai, second restaurant waiter
 Chung, third restaurant waiter, if the staging is large
 T'an, first student
 Peng, second student
 Yang, third student
 Tu, fourth student, small in stature
 Li and Kao and as many other students as are deemed effective
 Mrs. Kung and her two children, about seven and nine
 Three Chinese women evangelists: Mrs. J., Mrs. L., and Miss C.
 Missionary Woman
 Village woman, Mrs. Li

PROPERTIES:

Scene I. A Chinese restaurant in Ping Ting Chow, in Shansi Province, China. Three or four small, square wooden tables, and six or eight wooden benches without backs. Several Chinese teacups (without handles). A teapot or two. Several tea-towels.
Scene II, III, IV. A Chinese courtyard, a door and steps in background. Bench near doorstep; idol in niche in the wall of house; incense urn; tall, thin sticks of incense; red candles in candle-sticks; table in center of the stage; gong; gods; money; representation of flower garden.
Scene V. A simple, yet cozy room. Table, desk, typewriter, flowers in windows.
Scene VI. Courtyard same as Scenes II, III, IV. Small Bible, bowl and chopsticks, sewing material.
Scene VII. The same courtyard.



COSTUMES:

Care should be given to proper Chinese costuming. Chinese men and women wear long gowns, rather close fitting.

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Scene I

Time: Five o'clock in the afternoon.

Place: Chinese restaurant.

WANG (with towel over his shoulder, he picks up a couple of cups): Big brother, have you been down to the temple at the corner of the street since the sun was high?

CHAI: No, I haven't. Why should I go? It is warm here and there is plenty of tea/

WANG: I went down there when the noise was the loudest and the women were scared to death. Such a big to-do.

CHAI: What was the matter?

WANG: Didn't you know that today the students tore down the idols?

CHAI (horrified): Did they throw the idols down? Did they really? The spirits will get us! Aren't they afraid?

WANG: NO! T'an Kai Shih said that it was all nonsense to worship idols. He said that the only thing that would help us was science, and how to get the other fellow before he got you.

(Noise outside of people talking and laughing.)

Call from outside which the boys on the stage take up: Students are coming! Students are coming! Make a place for the students!

(Students enter, all talking and laughing at once.)

T'AN: Tea, Wang, tea! Tea for all of us, and make it hot. And bring plenty of peanuts and cakes. Tea and cakes, tea and cakes!

WANG: All right, all right!

(All find places at the tables. Have enough students to fill most of the tables.)

PENG (as he sits down): Ai-yah, Ai yah. I am thirsty. I don't know about the rest of you, but I AM thirsty. That old god in the upper city sure was dusty. When I was smashing him I swallowed so much dust that I almost feel like a mud god myself.

YANG: Well, Friend Peng, if you had seen little Tu (points to Tu) worshipping your most honorable self at a distance you would be more of a god in your own estimation than you are now. (Students look in Tu's direction and all laugh.)

(Chai and Wang, the waiters, come in with piles of cups and steaming pots of tea. They go about quietly serving. They follow it up with the cakes and peanuts. While this is going on the conversation continues.)

T'AN: Ai yah, ai yah, those fierce looking god-guardians at the entrance of the temple were sure hard old fellows to topple over. Whoever made those fellows wasted a good deal of wood and clay. (Gives deep audible sigh as he talks.)

YANG: And I thought Li (points to Li) and I would double up before they did totter. If Kao (points to Kao) had not tied the rope tight around the old fellow's neck we would have had one hard tumble, the strength that we put into that pull!

T'AN: And those old fellows! How fierce they looked! Those huge bodies! Those great glass eyes - the big clubs and swords in their hands. Their open mouths showing their teeth. If there had been any power in those fellows where would we be now?

PENG: And your ancestors and mine, Friend Yang, have been worshipping these mud and stone lumps all these years!

YANG: No! Not the idols, but the spirits they believed lived in the idols. But since we have studied western science, and have learned from Bertrand Russell WE KNOW BETTER.

PENG: What do you think of this doctrine called Christianity that the foreigners are preaching?

T'AN: Oh, (rather casually) it is like all the other religions, a bunch of legends and superstitions. Of course WE know that everything runs according to the laws of nature. This world is just one big machine. If you disobey the laws of that machine you get hurt just as much as you would if you stood in front of an oncoming automobile.

YANG: My criticism of this Christian doctrine is that it is not practical. All it talks about is to save your soul for the next world. We need something to save us in this world.

PENG: What China needs to be saved from today is (with disgust) the foreigners -- those imperialists.

T'AN: RIGHT YOU ARE! When China has the strongest army; when she has the fastest airplanes, and the longest range guns, THEN, will she take her rightful place in the world. THEN will China dictate to Great Britain and Japan, instead of being dictated to. THEN, will those countries have something to think about!

YANG: Then let them make unequal treaties if they like. Then let them trample on our soil if they dare. What do you go to their classes for?

PENG: I go to their classes because they teach English. A knowledge of English means money in your pockets these days.

YANG: Yes, but suppose you become a Christian, then what?

PENG: I'm not afraid. I'm after money, and if English is going to help me get it then I study English, I don't care who teaches it. (With disgust)

T'AN: Listen to the man! He will be a 'running dog' of the foreign imperialists yet.

YANG: All joking aside, fellows, we DID A GREAT THING for this province, and China, today. To think (with disgust) that the officials and soldiers were too superstitious and did not dare to destroy those things of mud and stone. To think! (with feeling and disgust) that all China has been held in this bondage to idolatry all these years. Isn't it a curse?

PENG: Well, better days are coming, Yang, better days are coming. For if what I hear is true all temple property goes to the government to be used for schools of learning or industrial training; and in another generation who knows what China will be?

T'AN: Well, let us hope so - let us hope so! (Call to waiters) Towels, boys, towels! And don't be all day about it!

(Explanation: It is the custom in Chinese restaurants, or after a Chinese feast to supply each individual with a towel wrung out of hot water. One towel may be used several times by being freshly wrung out of hot water before being served to the next individual. Sometimes the individual served throws the wet towel back to the serving boy, or just holds it out in his left hand to the serving boy. The individual generally rests his elbow on the table and the serving boy lays the towel over the up-raised hand. The towels are used to wipe the face and hands after eating.) (As the towels are passed the conversation continues.)

YANG (with hand clinched and thumb stuck up - a sign of approbation, speaks with satisfied air): Well, we've written our names on the pages of history today with those of the great. WE were the only ones in Ping Ting Chow free enough from superstition to free the city from the power of these idols. The officials wouldn't do it. The soldiers wouldn't do it. We had to do it.

ALL (with much vehemence) WE DARED TO DO IT. We pulled them down. We get the glory.

T'AN: They certainly had this business well organized in TaiYuanFu. The officials and police divided the city into districts, and before the sun was down there was not an idol left in that big city.

PENG: Yes, and what about TaiKu. The idols there were all smashed too!

YANG: Humph (with a sneer) and what happened at Chin Chou? Nothing. (Shakes his head and turns up his lips in disgust) Day was set and everything. Everybody was in fear of calamities because the idols were to go. But NO ONE DATED TO SMASH THEM!

PENG: Yes, but the city is locking the doors of the temples and no one is allowed to go thore to worship.

T'AN: Oh their superstitious fear! How foolish they are.

(Exit Students. They continue to discuss idols, foolish officials, etc.)

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Scene II

Place: Mrs. Kung's courtyard. Mrs. Kung working with her flowers. Children play with stones at one side. Enter Student.

STUDENT: Have you eaten today? (This is the casual greeting of the day.)

MRS. KUNG: Yes, son, have you?

STUDENT: You have some very beautiful flowers. Where did you get them?

MRS. KUNG: My foreign friends gave me the seed several years ago.

STUDENT: Do you believe in idols? Does that idol over there ever help you?

(Mrs. Kung (just continues with her flowers and picks off a yellow leaf or two.)

STUDENT: Do you really get any help from that? Does it really protect you from spirits?

(Mrs. Kung just smiles, waters her plants. She does not see the student get the idol from its niche in the wall.)

STUDENT (Goes over and gets idol, returns with it to the old woman): Look here! Can this thing really help you? Can it keep the evil spirits away?

MRS. KUNG (throws up her hands in perfect horror): Oh! Put it back! Put it back! Oh! Don't break it, don't break it!

STUDENT: But look - nothing happens, I'm not afraid.

MRS. KUNG (tense with horror and fear) Put it back, put it back! Oh! o-o-o-o, put it back! (She takes it from him and puts it back.)

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Scene III

Place: Mrs. Kung's courtyard. Mrs. Kung is lighting incense in her incense urn. She burns it before her idol. Picking up the red candles, she puts them into the candle sticks and lights them. The stage must have on it the table and gods, incense urn and candle sticks arranged as they do in worshipping their home gods. The table must be directly in the middle of the stage.

She has gold and silver money on the table. After the incense is lighted and the candles are burning, she reverently kneels and gives three "ke tou's" (bows head to ground.) She does this very reverently and slowly. Her hands are raised high as they clasp each other. This is an act of high esteem. She rings the gong or bell which is on the table. Have a Chinese gong if possible.

YANG: (With a sneer) And what happened at Chia Cheng? Nobody
heard and turned up his lips in disgust. Day was set and everything. Everybody
was in front of celebrities because the idols were so far. But NO ONE DARED TO
SPEAK THEN.

LENG: Yes, but the city is looking the heart of the temple and no one is allowed
to go there to worship.

YANG: Oh their superstitions! How foolish they are.

(Exit Students. They continue to discuss idols, foolish officials, etc.)

Scene II

LENG: (To Yang) Yang's courtyard. The Yang working with the flowers. Children play
in the garden at one side. Other students.

STUDENT: Have you come today? (This is the usual greeting of the day.)

LENG: KUNGS: Yes, son, have you?

STUDENT: You have some very beautiful flowers. Where did you get them?

LENG: KUNGS: My father (Leng) gave me the seed several years ago.

STUDENT: So you just came today to show them?

LENG: KUNGS: Just come to show them. (Leng looks at the flowers.)

STUDENT: So you really like them? You really like them? You really like them?

LENG: KUNGS: (To Student) Where did you get them? Where did you get them?
(Leng looks at the flowers.)

STUDENT: (To Leng) Look over and note what I told you. (Leng looks at the flowers.)
This thing really helps you. Don't stop the evil spirit away!

LENG: KUNGS: (Leng) I have seen in the past. (Leng looks at the flowers.)
Oh! Don't speak it. Don't speak it.

STUDENT: (To Leng) Don't speak it. Don't speak it.

LENG: KUNGS: (Leng) I have seen in the past. (Leng looks at the flowers.)
Oh! Don't speak it. Don't speak it.

Scene III

LENG: (To Yang) Yang's courtyard. The Yang working with the flowers. Children play
in the garden at one side. Other students.

<https://archive.org/details/totteringidolsp100seng>

As she rises from her worship voices of many people are heard outside and cries come to her ears. "Freedom for China, Freedom for China, Down with the idols. Make China free." The students come rushing in, carrying ropes and heavy sticks.

T'AN: Away with this superstition.

YANG: Down with the idols.

(T'an grabs the idol. Yang knocks over a red candle, and puts it out. Some of the paper money is trampled under foot. Yang takes some of the incense and scatters it in the yard. They rush in -- and rush out -- grab the idol in the yard -- and are gone. The old woman puts her hand to her head in agony and goes out.)

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Scene IV

Place: Courtyard. Mrs. Kung sits on the step, sighing and weeping.

(Enter first Chinese evangelist.)

FIRST EVANGELIST (In a loving tone) Sister, what is the matter?

(MRS. KUNG sighs a deep sigh.)

FIRST EVANGELIST: What's wrong?

MRS. KUNG: Oh - o-o-o-o! I'm so afraid. I'm so afraid!

FIRST EVANGELIST:(sits on the bench, near the steps): Afraid of what?

MRS. KUNG: Oh-o-o-o-o. They've taken my gods. I can't sleep--I can't eat--Oh-o-o-o, I'm so afraid. The evil spirits will get me. Some calamity will surely come. It might come any minute.

FIRST EVANGELIST: But, Sister, our Father in Heaven loves you. He will care for you. Why be afraid? Why not pray to Him?

MRS. KUNG: Who is the heavenly Father? I don't know how to pray. I'm so afraid.

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Scene V

Place: Missionary's Study.

(Missionary woman writing on typewriter. The Chinese women evangelists, carrying books and papers, enter. The Missionary welcomes them. They meet as a Committee to discuss their work.)

MISSIONARY: We have met to talk over some very hard problems. What shall we do with this new state of affairs? What can we evangelists do to help the people as their idols are being taken from them? They still believe these idols have power to change the course of events. They do not believe in Jesus. They do not know enough about Him to believe in Him. If they are left with a vacuum in their religious activity and thinking it will demoralize them and their last state will be worse than the first. What do you say?

FIRST EVANGELIST: It is pathetic. Just last week I called in the home of a friend I have known for three or four years. She has met difficulties in her home. Her idols have been taken away, and she feels the reason for the calamity in her home is because she does not burn incense as heretofore. She pointed to the empty place where her Buddhist idols had stood and said sadly, "I haven't that god to pray to, and do not know your Jesus." What shall I do? I ~~w~~alked to her awhile and she was glad to listen but she is not yet clear what to do. I felt so sorry for her. It takes careful teaching to bring them to the place where they believe in Jesus.

SECOND EVANGELIST: Yes, and just yesterday I visited a home, and the mother was weeping. She was so afraid. Her gods had just been torn down and thrown out in the ash heap all broken to pieces so she could not gather them up again. She fears calamity. And with no gods to which she may burn incense she does not know how to escape it. They cannot accept Jesus in dense ignorance. They must know something of the One to whom they will pray. What shall I do? How shall I teach them?

MISSIONARY: But how much do they know about their gods? What you say is true. They cannot accept Jesus in dense ignorance, but what do they know of their gods? It is a matter of faith rather than knowledge. Yet we must give them knowledge too. I have asked a number of people if they know who their kitchen god is. They laugh, and by their actions say, "No one knows. Why should you expect us to know?" But I get their attention as soon as I point out the fact that their kitchen god was a good man. I also tell them that they should seek to become good in the same way he did, for he worshiped the true god of heaven. They soon get the point that there is someone beyond him whom they should seek to know.

SECOND EVANGELIST (speaks to the Missionary): I wish I knew more about the history of these gods and what the people really believe. Couldn't we learn? Will you teach us?

MISSIONARY: The situation is serious. Let us learn together. We cannot force new facts upon the people, that would not help them. They learn slowly and gradually. We must live the life of our Master, Jesus Christ among them, mingling much with them in all the events of their lives. It is a long, hard work of love which is wonderfully worthwhile. We need to put our patience into a large rubber bag that will not break by expansion. There is no short cut, and no easy way. They only know Jesus as they see Him in us. We are their open Bible that they read daily. We must keep the love chapter always open before them.

(A village woman enters and sits down quietly and listens. Those in discussion do not see her for they were intent on what they were saying.)

THIRD EVANGELIST: In my work with the children I could get better results if it were not for the hindrance by the mothers. We must help the mothers. I find it easy to lead the children. They would not be so afraid if it were not for the adults of the family who have taught them fear and superstition from babyhood. If we can do something to rid the children of this terrible fear we will have done a very great labor of love, but how can we do this?

VILLAGE FRIEND: It's enough to make one afraid. I am afraid too. How can I not be afraid? My gods have been torn down and all the time I fear some calamity. A month ago my son was very ill, and I was sure he would die. I know the sickness came because my gods are thrown away. He never was sick like that before. Just two days ago my husband was thrown from a mule. He travels all the time, and has for years, but was never thrown from his mule until the idols were torn away. What shall I do? I'll just die (sadly and resignedly.) I have no plan. I can't sleep for fear.

FIRST EVANGELIST: Yes, you do have a plan. Jesus loves you. And even though your gods are thrown away He can help you. He does not want you to be afraid like this.

VILLAGE FRIEND: But I don't know who Jesus is. Is He another god? I am only an old woman who cannot read. How can He love me?

FIRST EVANGELIST: He does love you though. He does not mind if you cannot read, you are still His child.

MISSIONARY:(speaks to the evangelists): Continue to teach facts about God's world whenever you can. Intelligence drives out ignorance. Faith drives out fear. Give these fearful women a Jesus they can believe in. Be sure you are rid of your superstition and fear first. Are you superstitious? Are you afraid?

FIRST EVANGELIST: No, I'm not.

SECOND EVANGELIST: I must confess I am still afraid to be alone at night. I had fear so deeply rooted in me when a child that I can hardly get rid of it. I wish I could.

MISSIONARY (to First Evangelist): If you are not superstitious, then why that red string around your grandson's neck? (She laughs and does not answer for the string is to keep evil and harm from the child.)
Mrs. Li, you must believe in a stronger Jesus who is able to meet your problem, when I take my fears to Jesus he helps me. I know He can help you.
(Addressing whole group) What shall we do?

FIRST EVANGELIST: We must teach the mothers a little before they are willing for their children to be taught, otherwise they will not let the children come. They just say the little girls must tend the baby or spin thread.

SECOND EVANGELIST: The mothers are beginning to want something besides the hollow life they have had.

MISSIONARY: Do we know their background? Do we know their beliefs and fears? Do we know their economic pressure? Do we know how near the margin they live? Do we know how hard they work and how tired they get? Do we know how undernourished and overworked they are? Do we know how little they know of anything outside their little village circle? Do we know their religious beliefs, and how much these practices mean to them?

THIRD EVANGELIST: No, we do not know. No one has taught us and we do not know.

SECOND EVANGELIST: Yes, we do not know.

(First Evangelist nods head in agreement and thinks seriously.)

MISSIONARY: We must learn all these things about them if we are able to tactfully teach the fundamentals of Christianity, in such a way that their hearts, colored with their traditions and experiences, can receive the message of Jesus. That is the urgent call of the day. No one can truly be an evangelist and not hear this call. We must first LIVE our religion, and second we must TEACH it. ~~we~~ we must know their background sympathetically. We MUST live much with them. Shall we meet each evening this week to discuss these points and pray about this problem?

THIRD EVANGELIST: Yes, yes, we want to come if you will teach us. (Other two nod heads.)

FIRST EVANGELIST: Yes, I would like to learn more and be able to teach them better.

SECOND EVANGELIST: I shall be glad to meet together each evening. I'll put my baby to bed first. Since I have spent most of my life in a mission boarding school and I feel I know so little of village life and conditions.

THIRD EVANGELIST: I see the need, and I want to learn. You can help us much. I will come.

MISSIONARY: We will have discussions in the evening, and can have two hours if we like. As we meet the people through the day we will observe with these thoughts in mind and then come here for study and discussion in the evenings.

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Scene VI

Place: Same Courtyard. First Evangelist visits the home of Mrs. Kung who has had her idols torn down. Mrs. Kung and the two children are in the courtyard. Mrs. Kung with sewing in her hand. The children hold bowls of food in palm of hand and chopsticks in the other hand. (Noodles would be a typical food.) Chopsticks, used as tweezers, lifting the noodles to mouth and the bowl held almost touching the chin. Children walk about and listen attentively to what is being said.

FIRST EVANGELIST (from outside the door): Sister, are you at home?

MRS. KUNG: Come in quickly. (First Evangelist enters and sits on the bench.) How I love to have you come, and the children love to learn from their Jesus Aunt.

FIRST EVANGELIST: Do you still remember the song and prayer I taught you?

MRS. KUNG: Yes, I say the prayer each evening, and we sing the song together. The children help me where I forget.

FIRST EVANGELIST: Does it give you peace to pray to Jesus and trust Him? I see on your face that you are happier than before.

MRS. KUNG: Oh! I am, I didn't know you could have such peace and joy. At first I didn't believe what you said; but now I do. It is all true. I have experienced it.

FIRST EVANGELIST: It is such a joy to try all the time to be more like Jesus. Every day I'm happy.

MRS. KUNG: When my children are sick I pray. When their father is away I pray. He wants to know Jesus too. I'm telling my neighbors that life is so rich with Jesus. It was He who sent you to tell me. My relatives laugh at me. They do not want me to believe, but they know I am happier than they are. They do not curse me like they did at first.

FIRST EVANGELIST: You just live on in Jesus' Way and He will come, through His spirit, into their hearts and teach them how mistaken they are and they will change.

MRS. KUNG: I believe the Holy Spirit is changing me. I feel so different. I think so differently. I just want to pray when my friends curse about my new religion. Tell me more about the love chapter you have told me so often. And I want you to tell me more about your "James Three." I need to remember that chapter every day too.

FIRST EVANGELIST: Do you have your Bible? I did not bring my large one along and this little one has such small characters.

MRS. KUNG: Yes, it is here on the table.

(Brings Bible to the bench, sits by Evangelist. They bend over the open book.)

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Scene VII

In Pantomime

Place: Same Courtyard.

Same characters as in Scene VI. Then enter Missionary woman, Second Evangelist, and Third Evangelist, also the village woman, Mrs. Li. They arrange themselves in a group for worship and praise. As all bow heads in prayer, the curtain slowly closes. (Quartet music from off stage, singing and playing: "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun. Does His successive journeys run.")

